

Kelley Traister
Children's Education Partnership Manager
New Haven Home Recovery
153 East St.
New Haven, CT 06511

Good afternoon Senator Musto, Representative Urban and members of the committee. My name is Kelley Traister; I am the Children's Education Partnership Manager from New Haven Home Recovery in New Haven, CT. New Haven Home Recovery provides emergency shelter and housing services for women and children, including providing educational advocacy and support services for homeless youth. I am here today to urge you to provide an incredibly vulnerable and rapidly growing population with much needed support. You can do this by supporting the Homeless Youth Act.

As the Children's Education Partnership Manager, I work with representatives from each public school in New Haven as well as with community organizations that serve youth and families. Through my work with these schools and organizations, I have become aware of an issue that is increasingly alarming to me; at nearly every high school I have contact with, teachers, administrators, truancy officers, guidance counselors and social workers tell me that they know of students who have no place to call home; they have left home for many reasons; family conflict; they were kicked out; their family became homeless and they had to be separated from them because they were too old to be at the family shelter; they left abusive situations or their parents are unable to care for them due to a mental health or substance abuse issue. The challenges that these youth face are overwhelming. Without adequate guidance and support, these youth often have a difficult time with meeting their own basic needs for food, clothing and shelter.

For these youth, survival is their main focus; can you imagine what it must be like? Here are the stories of two of our New Haven students:

You're a 17 year old boy; your family was recently evicted from the apartment that you were living in. Your mom and younger siblings went to stay at a family shelter but, you couldn't go because you're too old. So, you're staying with a friend and his family, sleeping on the couch. They're nice but, you don't want to over stay your welcome so, you don't eat at home, which means you don't get to eat much. You haven't seen your mom in a week. You're worried about her because, you know she's got a lot on her mind, trying to find a permanent place to live for you and your four siblings. You know that for you, school is the only way out of this life; you want to do well but, with so much on your mind you can't get your work done.

You're an 18 year old girl, a senior in high school. You left home to avoid the abuse of your stepfather. He told you that they didn't want you there anyhow. You're staying with a friend whose mom allows other teenage girls to stay there. There are always different people staying in the house, you heard that some of the other girls there have

sex for money. Nobody has asked you to do that but, you don't feel safe there but, you have no where else to go. You're afraid to tell anyone at school because, they might report you but, now, you're having a hard time getting there everyday and your grades are starting to slip.

These are just two examples, two stories from youth in New Haven this year. These two students have been able to receive some support services through their schools and community organizations but, the reality is that they are dealing with issues well beyond their years. Both students realize that school is the best place for them to be but, when faced with decisions of survival, it becomes less of a priority. How can they focus on school when they aren't sure where they will sleep tonight, whether they will be safe, whether they will be able to eat? These two students were fortunate enough to have felt comfortable telling adults, which has assisted them in accessing services and support. For many other students additional barriers exist to doing well in school based on the instability of their housing; many unaccompanied youth have difficulty just getting to school. Youth might not have anywhere to shower or do their laundry, making them too embarrassed to go to school. So, the question is, what do these students need? They need the supports provided to them through the Homeless Youth Act to ensure that they have safe, supportive environments in which they can recover.